

Opening Statement  
Chairman Mark Souder

“Andean Counterdrug Initiative”

Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy,  
and Human Resources  
Committee on Government Reform

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Good afternoon. This is the second in a series of concise hearings on our nation's drug policy. Today we will examine the critical issues of drug supply in the Andean Region and will provide Members with an opportunity to focus on the President's 2005 Budget Request for the Andean Counterdrug Initiative. We will have the opportunity to discuss a wide range of drug policy, strategy, and implementation issues with Director Walters, on his own panel. We will then seat Assistant Secretary of State Charles and Assistant Secretary of Defense O'Connell on a second panel.

ONDCP has broad authority within the Executive Branch to coordinate national drug policy and budgets for federal drug control agencies. Under existing law, the Director reviews the annual budget requests for each federal department and agency charged with implementing a federal drug control program. If the budget is deemed inadequate to fulfill the President's strategy, the Director is empowered to propose funding levels and initiatives he believes are sufficient to do so, which generally must then be submitted to the Office of Management and Budget in lieu of the agency request. The certification authority is a powerful tool to enable the Director to exercise control over individual federal Departments and agencies to ensure the adequacy and coordination of national resources to fight drug abuse in America.

I believe that ONDCP has generally been highly successful in keeping the nation's focus and resources on the critical priority of reducing the supply and reducing drug use in America. The many positive signs and trends that Director Walters reported this past year, after the negative

trends during the previous Administration clearly demonstrate the difference that the office can make when strong and effective leadership combines with sound policy. For example, the 2003 Monitoring The Future survey showed an 11 percent decline in drug use by 8th, 10th, and 12th grade students over the past two years. The finding translates into 400,000 fewer teen drug users over two years, confirming that President Bush's two-year goal has been exceeded. Similarly, the 2003 Teens Partnership Attitude Tracking Study (PATs) survey corroborated the earlier reports that showed an 11 percent drop in youth drug use. We are beginning to see reductions in coca cultivation in Colombia. These victories are very encouraging to American families, treatment professionals, and law enforcement personnel who are working so hard to end drug abuse in America. However, significant challenges remain in virtually every area of coca and opium poppy producing regions in the Andean Region.

The FY 2005 request for the Andean Counterdrug Initiative will fund projects needed to continue the enforcement, border control, crop reduction, alternative economic development, democratic institution building, and administration of justice and human rights programs in the region. The ACI budget provides support to Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Brazil, Venezuela and Panama. The Subcommittee is concerned, however, that the 13 percent reduction between 2003 and the Administration's 2005 request for the initiative (from \$841 million to \$731 million) stifles the hard-earned successes that have recently become evident.

Of the \$731 million requested, \$463 million will be used to continue to support Colombia's unified campaign against drug trafficking and narco-terrorists. Funds will maintain support to the Colombian Army's aviation program and drug units, as well as the Colombian National Police in the areas of aviation, eradication and interdiction. It is important to understand that Plan Colombia is an initiative of the Colombian government and the Colombian people. The solution must come from within Colombia, and the plan is an effort to address a broad spectrum of social, economic and political issues that cannot be resolved in any other way. I have met with President Uribe several times and he is committed to this. It is equally apparent, however, that American assistance to and cooperation with the

plan is critical to make it work, and that the full support and commitment of the administration and Congress is essential.

Along the same line, the Plan is not just about Colombia, but is representative of an approach that we hope we can reinforce to spread throughout the entire Andean region. I met with Peruvian officials and learned of many difficulties their government is facing. I met with Ecuadorian officials as well who are concerned about traffickers moving over the border along the Putumayo. We must consider the great potential and the great challenge, as well as the constant need to consider the big picture as we proceed.

Today, we have invited witnesses from the administration to discuss the Andean Counterdrug Initiative: the efforts and results so far, the strategy in the coming year, and the adequacy of the resources requested. Appearing first, from the Office of National Drug Control Policy we have Director John Walters. After the first panel, from the Department of State we will hear from Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, Robert Charles. And from the Department of Defense, we have Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict, Thomas O'Connell. Our thanks to all of you for your willingness to testify, and for accommodating us in your schedule. I look forward to the opportunity to discuss our progress and how best to meet the counternarcotics challenges today.